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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/2011  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [HU](#)  
SUBJECT: HUNGARY'S ELECTIONS: THE VIEW FROM THE NORTHEAST  
(C-RE6-00145)

REF: STATE 22644

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY POL/C BOB PATTERSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Borsod-Abauj-Zemplen County in Hungary's northeast region is mostly rural, suffers from high unemployment and is a stronghold of the Reformed and Catholic Churches. Local observers believe that county voters will likely elect a majority of MSZP candidates to Parliament, although FIDESZ candidates may win a few individual races. Observers think that the District Ten race will almost certainly be won by FIDESZ incumbent Richard Horcsik (despite an interesting challenge from an MDF candidate), and the District 11 race will in all probability be won by MSZP incumbent Gyorgy Szabo. During March 8-9 discussions, local residents said the key local issues were unemployment, despair, youth and skilled worker flight from the area, and a lack of infrastructure. Most voiced the opinion that the Catholic and Reformed Church members will generally vote conservative, and they discounted the county's large Roma population as a political force.

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Background  
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¶2. (U) Borsod-Abauj-Zemplen county is located in northeastern Hungary near the Slovak border. Of the 19 regions in Hungary, Borsod is the second largest in terms of territory. Much of the region ranks in the lowest tier of Hungary's social-economic development, and unemployment, hovering around 18 percent (compared to 7 percent nationally), remains the greatest concern. This is particularly true of the smaller communities, many of whose inhabitants saw their jobs disappear as socialist era industries shut down after the political transition. Those that are employed work mainly in the government sector or in agriculture or agriculture-related business. A 2003 survey put the region's population at just above 738,000, including a high concentration of Roma, most of whom live in deep poverty. In 2002, the region counted 578,896 registered voters. The county's largest city and capital is the industrial center of Miskolc, which is generally held to be an MSZP stronghold. The county on the whole has traditionally voted for MSZP, with the party garnering 47 percent of the vote for the regional list in 2002. Its closest rival was the joint FIDESZ-MDF list, which attracted 37 percent of the vote. None of the smaller parties running in 2002 received more than 4 percent of the vote. Of the 13 individual constituencies in the region, in 2002 nine went to MSZP

candidates and four to FIDESZ.

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Out in the Sticks: District 10  
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13. (U) The majority of the Tenth District's roughly 49,000 registered voters live in the towns of Sarospatak and Satoraljaiújhely. Most of the rest of population is scattered among the close to 40 rural villages. In the previous 2002 parliamentary election the voting district elected FIDESZ MP Dr. Richard Horcsik to Parliament. At the time, FIDESZ and junior opposition party MDF were in alliance and Dr. Horcsik was a joint candidate representing both parties on the ballot. His main opponent in 2002 was MSZP candidate Mr. Gyozo Soos, who in the second round of voting received 44 percent of the votes to Horcsik's 55 percent.

14. (SBU) During March 8-9 meetings with various members of the community unanimously claimed that unemployment was the number one concern in the region and that national politics was of little consequence. Several community members worried that those aged 20-45 were fleeing to Miskolc or Budapest in order to find work. There was a widespread perception that both the Catholic and Reform churchgoers and farmers generally support FIDESZ, while the larger towns tend to back MSZP. All agreed that the Roma community was easily manipulated but that they were not a political factor in themselves. Most indicated their belief that Horcsik would prevail, but that the MSZP would remain dominant in the county.

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The Two Heavyweights  
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15. (C) The real race for the 10th district individual mandate is between FIDESZ incumbent Richard Horcsik and Gabor Janosdeak, the MDF supported "independent" mayor of Sarospatak. Although MSZP is expected to garner the second largest number of votes in the first round, Istvan Vecsi, the MSZP candidate, is considered by virtually all to be not a threat. The interesting action will occur in the second round when third-party votes are up for grabs.

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FIDESZ - Horcsik  
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16. (U) Horcsik is a nationally influential and popular FIDESZ MP, serving as a deputy faction head and on the Council of Europe. Except for the 1994-1998 cycle, Horcsik has been in Parliament since 1990 and has won his individual constituency since 1998. A Reform Church Minister who once taught college in the U.S., Horcsik is a local who graduated from Sarospatak's famous Reformed College. Most of his support comes from the villages and countryside. Even those individuals who are not FIDESZ sympathizers acknowledged that when Horcsik was MP in the FIDESZ government (1998-2002) he was very successful in promoting the interests of his constituency at the national level, particularly in improving access at nearby border crossings with Slovakia and Ukraine and basic infrastructure development.

17. (C) Horcsik told poloffs that national issues were not a factor and that the race would focus entirely on the local candidates. During meetings with poloffs, Horcsik described the main issue as unemployment, claiming that his district had an overall unemployment rate of 30 percent with some areas at 70 percent. He plans to reach out to his constituents by focusing on infrastructure development and subsidized housing for the young and elderly. Horcsik was clearly frustrated by the presence of Janosdeak in the race, and there appears to be a great deal of personal animosity between the two. The MP told poloffs that if this were a straight FIDESZ-MSZP race he would easily win in the first round. While he is confident of winning regardless, Horcsik

stated that Janosdeak's involvement guarantees the race will go to the second round and that it will be a longer and nastier campaign. Horcsik also emphasized that the current National Development Plan (NDP) that was crafted by the MSZP government is a disaster for his county. According to Horcsik, the NDP details virtually no EU development funds to the region for the 2007-2013 EU budgetary cycle. The generally jovial Horcsik was so livid over the issue that he actually choked up and said "I'm so mad at this (obscenity) government."

¶8. (C) Horcsik described the region as the "conservative Christian" area of Hungary and he is not hesitant to appeal to his Reformed Church roots. On March 8 Poloffs observed a celebration for International Women's Day in Vajdacska, a small village outside Sarospatak (boasting one of the few female mayors in the county), where Horcsik was the guest of honor. He didn't bother to give a speech, choosing instead to read from his Bible (Proverbs 31). In a meeting the following day (March 9) Horcsik was quick to dismiss the Roma as a political force, calling them a "black hole" about whom no one knows what is going on. (The region is dotted with many Roma-majority or all-Roma settlements and Roma are thought to constitute about 10-15 percent of the population.) Horcsik observed that when the Roma do vote, it is only because they are promised a few thousand forints or a few kilos of food.

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MDF - Janosdeak  
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¶9. (C) Janosdeak is also home-grown politician. He is a lawyer and has been mayor of Sarospatak for 16 years. Although he calls himself an independent, he is widely perceived to be closely associated with MSZP. In 2005 he even attempted to be the MSZP candidate for the tenth district before he withdrew his name. He says that local MDF voters approached him to run with their support, but that there is no real MDF organization left in the district. Sarospatak tends to lean to the conservative side of the political spectrum, but Janosdeak's obvious popularity makes this his private stronghold.

¶10. (C) Janosdeak also stated that unemployment was the key concern and that this would be a race between individuals. Janosdeak hopes to help this situation by pushing for a thruway extension from Miskolc (the only way to reach

Sarospatak by road is via 60 kilometers of two-lane blacktop), developing an industrial park and promoting tourism, spas and winter sports. He admitted that most of his support would be found only in Sarospatak, but he claimed that he thinks he has a good chance of entering the second round of elections outright, making it a 3-way contest.

¶11. (C) Janosdeak agreed that religion influences how many voters feel. He observed that about one-third of the region's voters tend to be regular churchgoers and that of these one-third were Reformed and two-thirds Catholic. He said churchgoers tend to vote conservative but he expressed his disdain for the church in general, alleging it could be bought off (likely a reference to the school subsidy issue.) The Mayor agreed that Roma were easily manipulated and politically apathetic.

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The X Factor  
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¶12. (C) Further complicating matters is the presence in the race of MIEP candidate Attila Barati. Barati is the mayor of the village of Pacin and his support springs from the area of Bodrogkoz, an area which has a large Roma population and high rates of unemployment and petty crime. Barati is not overtly anti-Roma, but his law and order approach appeals to the residents of that area who are fed up with the local crime rate, which they trace to the Roma community. When Barati

last ran in 1998, he garnered close to 8 percent of the vote. Local journalist Attila Bodisz (who by his own admission is no FIDESZ supporter) estimated that Horcsik has a 75 percent chance to win the election, but with so many third party votes up for grabs it is far from a lock. Assuming that Horcsik would easily gather the most votes in the first round, Bodisz presented two possible scenarios for the second round: The first would occur if the MSZP candidate gained the second largest amount of votes in the first round. In this case, even if Janosdeak threw his support to MSZP, it would likely not be enough for Vecsi to win as many conservative MDF supporters would not vote for MSZP. The second case would involve Janosdeak garnering the second largest vote total in the first round. In this case MSZP would likely throw its weight behind Janosdeak and with his well-known MSZP leanings he would likely keep most of them, thus making it a much closer affair. Bodisz said no one could truly predict what would happen with the MIEP votes, but they might just be enough to turn the tide for either party.

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On the Periphery  
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¶13. (SBU) That both Janosdeak and Horcsik are in touch with the situation on the ground was made quite clear after discussing the campaign with local citizens. In order to find out the perspective from the religious demographic, poloffs met with Dr. Erdei Palne, director of the Sarospatak Reformed College. In addition to the issues of unemployment and the drain of youth and intellectuals, Dr. Palne pointed out that the region is quite literally on the periphery, lacking any major infrastructure to connect it to the rest of Hungary and this translates into a sense of social marginalization. Palne said that the high unemployment rate has affected the students; in many cases they are not able to pay their tuition and the school will be forced to make cutbacks. The Roma situation was also emphasized when Palne said that they have about 7 Roma students (out of a student body of 800). She agreed that the election here is mostly about local issues, but that broader issues are also important to the church. Because of this, churchgoers are more likely to focus on the party platform and vote ideologically, i.e., for FIDESZ. Palne made several comments concerning tension between the local government and the Church. When asked who she thought would win the election, she took an obvious shot at Janosdeak by responding "The candidate who doesn't keep changing his colors."

¶14. (SBU) Similar sentiments were expressed by Aniko Plosz, the economic director of the area's main tourist attraction, Sarospatak Castle. Plosz added a personal touch to the constant drumbeat of youth flight, describing how her own children had left the area to find work. The unemployment situation was emphasized by Plosz's claim that the Castle and the Reform College were the two main institutions propping up Sarospatak financially. Although not as obviously pro-Fidesz as Palne, Plosz predicted a Horcsik win based on his popularity in the countryside, and his past help in improving the local infrastructure. She also referred indirectly to the perception of Janosdeak as self serving by claiming that

character issues would also help Horcsik win re-election.

¶15. (SBU) Local journalist Attila Bodisz gave a balanced and clear picture of the situation. Although he didn't reveal his party affiliation, he said he was definitely not a FIDESZ supporter. In addition to the above mentioned campaign analysis, Bodisz shed some insight on why Horcsik retains his popularity. Besides Horcsik, several other FIDESZ heavyweights, such as party ideologue Istvan Stumpf, have close ties to the region. Many locals want a "heavy dose of positive discrimination" for the region and believe that with FIDESZ back in power, Horcsik will be able to direct funds and projects their way. Horcsik does have some handicaps however, as Bodisz said that many perceive the incumbent's advisors to be opportunists. Bodisz also said that he expects the campaign to get nastier as there is a rumor in the wind

about FIDESZ advisors reporting to the police about dirt on Janosdeak. Despite Horcsik winning individually, Bodisz predicted along with the others, that MSZP would dominate the county.

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Rematch: District 11  
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¶16. (U) Closer to Budapest than the tenth district, the eleventh voting district is similar in size to the tenth, with roughly 48,000 registered voters. The district is no stranger to political intrigue when it comes to electing its parliamentary representative. In the 1998 general elections voters chose Mihaly Kupa as their representative. Kupa, who is now head of the marginal Centrum Party, was the last independent MP elected to the Hungarian National Assembly. In 2002 the race between the FIDESZ candidate Ferenc Koncz and Gyorgy Szabo from MSZP was decided by a mere five votes for the latter. A series of legal disputes ensued involving ballot recounts, which ended with an official win by Szabo by two votes.

¶17. (SBU) Despite being closer to Budapest and more connected to Hungary in general, the locals of the eleventh district evinced much more despair than those around Sarospatak. Unemployment and disillusionment was the theme. As in the tenth district, most residents felt that MSZP would win the county, religious voters tend to go with conservative parties and the Roma were not considered a force at the ballot box. They differed though, in that all said that national party platforms, not local politics, are what matter most to voters. The negative campaigning of FIDESZ was often mentioned as unfavorable for the party. Although the current race is a rematch of the razor close 2002 election, the vast majority of people interviewed predicted MSZP candidate Gyorgy Szabo would win re-election. Most based this opinion largely on Szabo's reasonable record of bringing support to the area, the poorly-run FIDESZ campaign, and the fact that the area was hemorrhaging younger adults who traditionally vote FIDESZ.

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"This Region is Cursed"  
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¶18. (SBU) Hopelessness was the order of the day in Legyesbénye (population 1700), a farming village located between Miskolc and Sarospatak. During a March 9 roundtable with local villagers, all were unanimous in identifying joblessness as the number one regional concern. One local, a locksmith who has been unemployed for seven years, described the region as "cursed". He voiced the dominant opinion that long term prospects for the area are bleak with no investors and the few remaining manufacturing and agricultural jobs threatened by EU accession and "globalization." This was echoed by the owner of the local pub, who said that virtually all his customers voiced their disillusionment and despair. He said that political apathy was rife in the region. Another villager who has served on several local election commissions said that Legyesbénye's turnout averages 40-45 percent for any kind of vote and that this figure is more than 10 percent below the national average. A small business owner complained that there was virtually no incentive for entrepreneurship as high taxes and complex tax laws severely hampered any chance of profit. Roma non-involvement was still the theme, and several of the participants said the local Roma population was only around 5 percent.

¶19. (SBU) All agreed that the race was purely between parties and no one in the group could recall when a parliamentary candidate had last visited the village. Five of the seven said that MSZP would win the individual race, one thought it could go either way and one felt FIDESZ would win individually. Everyone said MSZP was almost sure to win the county because everyone voted by party and MSZP is traditionally strong in the area. The pub owner emphasized



the tendency to vote by party when he observed that many of his customers could not even identify the candidate of their party. However, he did not say whether this was due to political apathy or other reasons.

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Farmers Cultivate MSZP  
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¶20. (SBU) In the village of Bekecs (population 2500), Poloffs met at the same time with Laszlo Varga, the retired director of the local farm co-op and a MSZP sympathizer, and Attila Fesus, FIDESZ supporter and owner of a local agri-business. In spite of the vast gulf between their parties, they concurred on the lay of the land. In regards to religion, both felt that churchgoers were more inclined to vote conservative, but clergy influence was probably limited to older parishioners. Younger religious voters were likely to be fewer and independent. Regardless, the church was not as big an influence in this particular area because as Fesus stated, "It's hard to reverse 40 years of atheism." As in Legyesbénye, the consensus was that national politics trumps local politics. Varga mentioned that many of the local farmers and pensioners are nostalgic for the Kadar era and associate MSZP with the security they remember. Fesus also stated that in his view, FIDESZ's focus on negative campaigning would turn off independent voters. As a result, he thought this farm-dominated area would go for MSZP individually and county-wide.

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No Sweet Dreams for Szerencs  
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¶21. (SBU) Local intellectual and FIDESZ supporter Lazslone Fazekas's thoughts dovetailed with the rest of the eleventh district inhabitants. Fazekas is the director of the castle museum in Szerencs, an agricultural hub town of about 10,000 people. Of course, unemployment figured prominently as the issue in his view. Fazekas noted that the town's two main employers had been a chocolate factory and a sugar factory. In recent years, the chocolate factory was purchased by NESTLE, which then moved most of its production to the Czech Republic, leaving only about 300 jobs out of several thousand at the plant. The sugar factory is also facing problems as a decrease in government subsidies makes its future uncertain. If the factory closes, Fazekas says the impact on the area would be devastating as much of the local agriculture revolves around sugar beet production. The joblessness has also led to skilled labor and youth flight, further contributing to the region's sense of despair.

¶22. (SBU) Although she dismissed it as a political factor, Fazekas said the Roma community was an issue. She commented on the fact that their population was increasing because of their higher birth rates. She claimed that many villages were completely Roma and others were in the process of being "Roma-fied." Even though the Roma are politically uninvolved, Fazekas said that the fact most are dependent on the state for a living makes this a situation of concern for the region. According to Fazekas, her concern is not that they are Roma, but that they are unemployed.

¶23. (SBU) As a result of its agricultural influences and large unemployment rate, Fazekas said that Szerencs tends to lean to the left. Local FIDESZ supporters tend to be members of the intellectual class and ex-56ers, in addition to Calvinist and Catholic believers. Fazekas's main concern was the harsh political climate in Hungary. The region is filled with angst and there is no dialogue between the parties. Fazekas said that party sympathizers will not even identify themselves as such because they are cowed by the atmosphere. Still, locals tend to vote by party and as such she expects Szabo to triumph over Koncze and MSZP to control the county. Fazekas also observed that FIDESZ's negative campaign was counter-productive as it would alienate more undecided voters than it would attract, further helping MSZP.

¶24. (U) Visit U.S. Embassy Budapest's classified website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/budapest/index.cfm](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/budapest/index.cfm).  
WALKER